

The Coming of the Kingdom of God

Caversham Baptist Church

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I've been asked to carry on our series on Luke that we've been doing for the last few years. I think Dad was probably hoping we'd finish before he finished but, as you well know, you don't always get what you want in life.

I hope God will speak to everyone who's here this morning, but this week, as I've been preparing my message, I've been thinking a lot about people here who have never made the decision to follow Jesus. You know what it's like when you're looking at buying a car. You go along to the car yard, kick the tyres and take the car for a test drive. There are people here every week who are doing that with Christianity. They're checking out what it means to know God, they're finding out about Jesus and they're learning things about the Holy Spirit. They're looking at Christianity and looking to see if the things we say we believe match up with how we live. That's a good thing and I've prepared my message today especially with you in mind.

Luke 17:20-37

The Coming of the Kingdom of God

²⁰Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, ²¹nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

²²Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. ²³People will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. ²⁴For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. ²⁵But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

²⁶"Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

²⁸"It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. ²⁹But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

³⁰"It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹On that day no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. ³²Remember Lot's wife! ³³Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. ³⁴I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left." ³⁶Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.

³⁷"Where, Lord?" they asked.

He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

Here are two very interesting passages. In verses 20 and 21 Jesus answered the question of the Pharisees as to when the Kingdom of God would come. He said that it would not come with signs that you can watch for. The word he used is the word that is used for a doctor watching a patient for symptoms of some disease which they suspect.

We can't be totally sure of what Jesus said because verse 21 has two different endings – is *within* you and is *among* you. Good quality Bibles note that both endings are possible. The original Greek text may mean the Kingdom of God is within you. That is to say, the Kingdom of God works in people's hearts. The Kingdom of God is not about producing new things, but new people. It is not a revolution in

material things that we are to look for, but a revolution in the hearts of people. The Pharisees were looking for a Messiah who would overthrow Roman rule and restore Israel to its glory days. They just didn't get what Jesus was on about.

But it may also mean, the Kingdom of God is among you. That would refer to Jesus himself. He was the very embodiment of the Kingdom, and they did not recognise him. It was as if he said, "The whole offer and the whole secret of God is here – and you will not accept it."

I think both definitions are true.

Verses 22-37 speak of the Second Coming of Jesus.

There will be times when Christians will long for the coming of Christ. Imagine if the massacre that took place in Christchurch last week had happened in our church. If someone just came in here now and started shooting as many of us as he could. Some of us would be devastated by the loss of our loved ones and, like the martyred saints in Revelation 6, we would cry out, "How long?"

Revelation 6:9-10 says:

When he [the Lamb/Jesus] opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"

Sometimes we cry out, "How long?" but we have to learn to be patient and to wait. God takes his own time.

Revelation 6:11 continues:

Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants, and brothers and sisters who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

The media has been saturated with stories about Christchurch for the last nine days, but we don't hear a lot about our brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering around the world unless we go looking for it. Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) is an international non-profit organisation whose mission is to defend the human rights of persecuted Christians. The US office was founded in 1967 by Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who himself spent fourteen years in a Communist prison in Romania for his faith in Christ, most of the time in solitary confinement in a very small, uncomfortable cell. Revelation 6:9-11 is a reality for some Christians around the world today. We should be grateful that it's not a reality for us!

www.vom.org.nz

I encourage you to visit the website of Voice of the Martyrs to find out what's happening to Christians around the world. You'll be able to pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering intelligently, you'll be able to support them financially, you'll be able to write to the governments of countries where Christians are being persecuted to remind them of the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights. You may choose not to take any action, but you'll become incredibly grateful that, at the moment in New Zealand, it's not particularly difficult to be a follower of Jesus. It may not always be that way.

Let's continue. Verses 22-25 are about the second coming of Jesus, or the Son of Man, a title he liked to use about himself. The coming of Christ is certain, but the time of that coming is unknown. Speculation is vain and useless. People will come with false prophecies and false predictions. We are best not to follow them and to remember the words of Micah (6:8):

He has shown you, people, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

The coming of Christ is certain, but the time of that coming is unknown. What we do know, however, is how Jesus will return. All

biblical scholars agree that Acts was written by the same author as Luke. One of the things that gives it away is that both books are written to the same person, Theophilus, who has some relatives here today.

Acts 1:1-11

Jesus Taken Up Into Heaven

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ²until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.”

⁶Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Somehow, in a way that our minds can't comprehend, Jesus will return and the whole world will know about it. Some people will be on the roof of their house, suggesting that it's early evening. Others will be in the field, implying that they'll be working during the day. Others will be in bed, so that's obviously night time, while two women grinding grain again suggests that it's daytime where they are. People will be doing different things because, as we know, and as Jesus knew, the time is different in different parts of the world.

When we lived in Sydney in 1983 we used to experience some amazing lightning strikes. I guess because it's warmer in Sydney than Dunedin, and it's a lot more humid too, we would see this amazing forked lightning that would stretch across the sky. Jesus said it would be like that when he returned. Everyone will be aware that he has come back - no one will foresee it, but all people will see it.

Jesus is coming back and when he comes back he will bring a time of judgement on the earth. Verses 26-29 contain a warning. God judged the earth in the days of Noah.

When that day comes the judgement of God will operate and, of two people who, all their lives, lived side by side, one will be taken and the other will be left. There is a warning here. Intimacy with a Christian does not guarantee a person's salvation. Individuals have to respond to Jesus themselves because the judgement of God is an individual judgement. The Kingdom of God grows one precious life at a time. Often one will be taken, or saved, while the other will be left.

Genesis 6:5-8

⁵The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. ⁶The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. ⁷So the LORD said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” ⁸But Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD.

There is a warning here, pure and simple. God has judged the people of the earth before and found them wanting. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God (Genesis 6:9). The human race survived because one person did what was right and because Noah did everything just as God commanded him (Genesis 6:22).

It was the same in the days of Lot. God couldn't ignore the evil that was going on in Sodom and Gomorrah and so he destroyed those places. There's a special warning here for people who choose to follow God and then look back fondly at their old way of living. Remember Lot's wife! When we choose to follow Jesus we have to leave the past behind.

You know, it's quite unfashionable to talk about God's judgement. In recent years I've noticed there's a strong belief in large sections of our society about a loving God. If you want to know what the people around you believe about life after death, then you need to familiarise yourself with two excellent sources. One is the death and in memoriam section on the second to last page of the paper. The other source is the messages left on people's Facebook pages after they've died (I don't really do Facebook but, more and more, stuff posted on social media pages is finding its way into newspaper articles).

If you analyse these sources, you'll realise that there's a strong belief that there's another, better, life to come after this one. People want to believe that there's a God who has created a place where we can meet up again with those we love. Read the paper and see it for yourself. There's talk of continuing on in your journey, flying free with the angels, hassling other members of the whanau who have already passed away and watching over the living.

Just a few weeks ago, when the Highlanders were winning games, they played the Reds at the stadium. One of the Reds' players, Izack Rodda, played even though his father had died just two days previously. During the match, Karl Te Nana, one of the

commentators said, "His old man will be watching this upstairs." Why? Because we want to believe in a life after this one. It's the way we're wired.

The problem is that a loving God who has created an amazing heaven for people only tells part of the story. God is loving, 1 John 4:8 says God is love, but God is also holy. That means God is perfect in every way. Because of our sinful nature we simply don't measure up to that and we deserve to be separated from God, now and forever. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

You know, we sing a lot of songs about God's love, we sing a few about his holiness, but we don't sing a lot about his justice.

Paul goes on to say:

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Romans 5:9-11

How we live now matters. How we live now matters.

Listen to these words from Titus 2:11-14

¹¹For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹²It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.